

99-02-05b Colossians

We're resuming now in our study of Colossians chapter 3. And I wanted to point out, and I think we have done, the link between the principles of truth that are communicated and the exhortations and the outline of the life that we are called to lead. Because sometimes we have those two pieces and we don't necessarily connect them together. A lot of times people can sit in a congregation or in Bible class or even in their own study of the Word of God and they think, well, why am I over here in Habakkuk or Zephaniah? What does it really matter to me what happened in the middle of the book of Acts? I'm living life here.

I've got problems. I don't live in first century Palestine. I live in 21st century America.

Why do I need all of this? And there are people who will say this in books and tapes and TV shows and so forth, that, well, the church has got to quit sitting and soaking and souring. It needs to get out and be active in ministry. And we've got to win the world for Christ.

And we've got to get the gospel in every language by the year 2000, one thing or another. And it's what we've just been talking about. It's using the wrong measure.

We have a real problem with how to evaluate our success or how to evaluate where we stand before God. We use what are typically human measures. Any organization could measure growth by numbers.

Any organization could evaluate its members by how energetic they are or how involved they are, how much time they spend, how late do they work and that kind of thing. Those are all human viewpoint measures. God is looking at the heart.

God equips us in the heart. The standard of measure is in the heart. And we fail to recognize sometimes God gives us tremendous victories.

And we ought to be standing up and cheering. It ought to be like our team winning the Super Bowl when after maybe a long time of struggling with something, we have finally reached the place, we've grown to the point where we are no longer tripped up and caused to fail. We're no longer ensnared by some little area that has constantly caused us to stumble in the past.

And it's a wonderful thing. It's a great victory. It proves the power of the Word of God.

Because changing a human heart is a greater feat than changing someone's behavior. Anyone can change behavior. It always reminds me, one of my favorite studies in the Gospels was when Jesus travels across the Sea of Galilee and goes over to the man who is possessed with the legion demons.

And it tells the story of how many people had tried to bind him and they had shackled his ankles and they had bound his wrists, but he would always break the ropes and smash the shackles on

the rocks and people were afraid to get around him because their human efforts to control his behavior worked for a time but ultimately failed. They couldn't keep close on him. They couldn't keep him from running out and scaring the passers-by.

But when Jesus came and he made the choice, he didn't have the power to get rid of the demons himself, but he knew who to run to. And he ran to the Lord Jesus and fell at his feet. That's all he had to do.

Jesus cleansed him on the inside. Jesus addressed the problem on the inside and sent the legion of demons out. And the townspeople returned to find him sitting upright clothed and in his right mind, something the people for years have never been able to do, put any kind of control over this man.

Jesus solves the problem on the inside. He doesn't need shackles and he doesn't need bonds and they don't need to be afraid and run away. In fact, they were more afraid when they found him sitting clothed and in his right mind.

Jesus scared them because of that power. It is a greater power that can transform on the inside than anything that happens on the outside. We are too quick to measure by external things and we don't give enough credit when God does amazing things on the inside.

And we need to give credit in our own lives and in our own souls and be looking for those victories. Don't let anyone judge you, Paul says. Don't let yourself be caught up in the idea that your life is measured by what you do, how many people you minister to or impact or where you attend church or any other of the real common measures that people tend to use.

People judge by all kinds of faulty standards. Paul says don't let anyone judge you. Don't let anyone take you captive to this goofy way of measuring.

He says you've got to put to death these things that are on the earth and instead put on the new man. Well, how do we do that? We can't just decide to be the new man any more than an overweight person can decide to be thin or an out of shape person can decide to be athletic. We have to know the means of making that happen and the means is to recognize the value of the truth.

So many Christians today, remember Paul tells Timothy, in the latter days people are going to be impatient. They want people to tickle their ears. They want to hear something stimulating.

They want to hear breakthroughs. They want to hear revelations. They want to see signs and hear of wonders.

They want something that's stimulating, that's entertaining, that gives them an emotional rush. What kind of worship services characterize churches today? Pick up any book. I've picked them

up and I'll tell you about it.

You don't have to pick them up. Any of the books that talk about church worship life, church growth, church dynamics. I got a flyer here recently that it's going to be a big seminar from a guy in California that took his church from two families to 15,000 members and he's going to come out here and tell everybody how he did it and how to do all of these things.

We look at those things and we let people make those the default measure of what success is instead of recognizing that the ability to produce the fruit of the Spirit, the ability to have joy and peace and patience, that's what God is looking for. God can raise up rocks to do this other stuff. Jesus said these people shouting hosanna and so forth, if they weren't shouting the rocks would cry out.

There's no problem with the external physical things. The difficulty, what no one can do, what Satan with his best efforts can't do, what man with his best efforts can't do is change the human soul. God can do it and when we are living examples of that, that is the fulfillment of our calling.

That is what pleases God. That's what Paul has been emphasizing by constantly in this letter referring back to the heavenly things, the spiritual things. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father.

God is pleased with a human being sitting at his right hand. Christ has made us acceptable. We are accepted and to be loved.

You don't have to let anyone make us feel inferior or make us feel insufficient or inadequate or not worthy or not good enough to hold up our heads with the rest of believers or not loving enough or not having enough of a heart for the lost. Any of these other things that travel around, it sometimes seems, and it's like God told the prophet, there are 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal and there are many other believers besides us that understand the truth of the word of God. But it's hard to hear those still small voices in the din of what the church at large is saying today.

It's all about growth. It's all about impact. It's all about visibility and about operating in the world and patting each other on the back and so forth.

So this is why Paul goes back again and again to these truths that don't necessarily tickle the ear, that don't necessarily provide a rush of adrenaline or a big stimulation. A lot of these are quiet, solid, profound, deep things that require some time and some meditation to fully appreciate or to even begin to understand their meaning. What does it mean? You can pick almost anything in what Paul has said in Colossians in these first few chapters, thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ and so on.

But we're in a high-pressure society, a high-speed society, sound bites and short, you just look at

the commercials on TV. How many different shots can they fit into 30 seconds? That seems to be the contest. How many times can they cut away from one camera to another? It's just so frenetic and so fast-paced.

It's like we don't want you to have time to think. We're going to keep flashing images up here so that you won't stop and use your mind. We want to get an impression across.

We want to hook you for our product. We don't want to give you the time to consider and reflect and meditate on the fact that how can a toothpaste possibly have that big an impact on my social life? How can a laundry detergent? Are people really going to notice how white my T-shirts are? We're not allowed to stop and think. We have to get back to a biblical form of life where we take the time to think, where we take the time to spend time talking to each other.

This is the great thing about marriage. You've got two people right there in the same place who can talk to each other and can encourage each other and can slow each other down and can together have fellowship in the things of life and how God's word relates to it. This is what Paul is reminding you.

You remember the situation. We've reviewed it where Epaphras has come because there's a big controversy. There's these alternate philosophies and ideas swirling around and believers are asking questions that Epaphras can't answer.

Who's to say? These seem to have an element of truth. These people are quoting Scripture over here. They're quoting the law of Moses.

We know that that's true. Paul, you yourself have said the law is righteous and good. Jesus said that he came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it.

Well, that's what they're basing this idea on. How can it be wrong for me to go back and be circumcised and to follow the teachings of Moses? God handed those down from Mount Sinai. You're not saying that that's not the proper life that pleases God, are you? Epaphras is saying, well, but, but, but, but, but.

Then he's heading west to find Paul and say, I'm still kind of young in the faith here. Can you communicate these things? What does Paul do? Paul just, there's so much truth packed into this letter, just like all of his letters. Every verse, when you look at it, he's making statements of fact.

And when you glean them out and just put them in statement form, there's dozens of propositional truths. And the advantage of that is when the Word of God makes a statement, that is a proffered reality. Here is an aspect of reality.

People do this without even realizing it in society today. Science will come out with a pronouncement and say that a certain food is good for you or bad for you. They, what was the thing I just heard this week? Some new health thing.

I mean, every week there's just multitudinous examples of it. But they were, oh, I forget now, something about how you won't get cancer if you do a certain thing that they used to think gave you cancer. A couple of weeks ago it was oat bran doesn't do anything for you.

But people treat this as reality. And you'll see people change their diet. People will, everybody's got a wildfire scare going about aspartame.

And aspartame is the cause of every bad thing that's ever happened in the entire history of humanity. Every sickness, every cross-eyed glance that you might see, that's aspartame. Aspartame did it all.

It robs your memory and deformed, it's just amazing the things that are attributed to aspartame. Well, there are people who will now spend twice as long shopping because they're reading every label of it. Aspartame, they won't buy it.

Who knows? Oh, I know what it was. I know what it was. Now, it wasn't even in the area of food because I was getting tired of using food examples.

This is in the area of computers. The Y2K scare. The scare among us going on about Y2K.

And I watched Hal Lindsey and his old compatriot again last night on the intelligence briefing update or whatever it is. And they were talking about, they themselves were saying, you know, the other guy, I can't remember his name, he said, you know, Hal, don't you think we're getting a bad name because some Christians are really overblowing the Y2K thing? And I felt like rising up and saying, calling him blessed because somebody finally said it's being overblown. It's ridiculously overblown.

We're going to have this nuclear winter and enter the dark ages because some people didn't make sure the dates were right in their computers. Everybody that has a computer has had to go through days when the computer was down. Everybody has figured out how to do that.

And if the date is all this thing about I can go on and on, embedded chips and stuff, it's all a lot of nonsense. But people treat that as reality. So what do they do? Somebody somewhere believes that Hal Lindsey walked down from Mount Sinai.

And if Hal says that the Y2K thing is big, where's the dehydrated food? Where's the bottled water? Where's the canned goods? This is how they sold bomb shelters in the 50s. This is how 100 years ago they had Christians standing out there cutting holes in sheets waiting for the big earthquake that was going to wipe out civilization and Jesus was going to come back. Somebody believes that that's a reality.

And it completely alters the way they live. Their priorities, how they spend their money, how they spend their time, what their fears are, what their hopes are, what they're basing their trust in. I've

got a whole locker full of canned food and dehydrated food and bottled water.

So now I'm safe. I was worried about Y2K, but now that I've got all this food down in the basement, I'm not worried anymore. What is the basis of your security? What are you putting your trust in? Well, I've got those 16 jugs of bottled water.

That's what I'm putting my confidence in. But you see that your perception of reality, what you believe to be true, that shapes how you spend your day and what you react to and how confident you are and how much different things affect you. If the truth of the word of God gets inside your soul, which is the ultimate objective reality, it is the real truth, and if that settles into our souls and aligns our thoughts with God's thinking, aligns our priorities with God's priorities, now our lives and our daily decisions and the innermost thoughts of our heart take on eternal significance.

So look, in Colossians 3, when Paul says in verse 8, you yourselves are to put off all these. What are they? If you listen to the church at large today, what should we put off? We should put off the homosexual lifestyle. We should put off adultery among Christian leaders.

We should put off abortions. We should put off all these other things that are part of the social agenda, external things, easily measured. Are some of these things very wrong and bad and deplorable? Yes, they are.

But what does Paul say? Where does Paul start? He says, if you're going to put off the old man, if you're going to put off the earthly things, cut off the hand and the foot that offends, what are you putting off? Anger. Well, let's meditate on anger for a little bit. When's the last time we sat down and thought, where are the areas in my life where I have anger, where I get my apple cart upset? Do I get angry at people? Some people get very angry.

You don't even want to let them watch the news or read the newspaper when they're visiting you because they just get angry. They read about things in politics, or they read about things with what's going on with the military, or defense spending cuts, or whatever, and they just go ballistic. They start turning red from the collar up, and you think, boy, let's just get all the media stuff out of the way.

This person is just losing it. Some people, they can think back on stuff that happened 20, 30, 40 years ago and just get livid. That's a new word the girls learned this past week, livid.

What does livid mean? Well, what are the areas of anger? God says, put away anger. How are you going to put away anger? How are you going to keep? You think about whatever it is that makes you angry. I can think of things that make me angry.

Y2K scaremongering makes me angry. But you think about it, and I think now, can I just un-anger myself over that and just say, oh, I don't care anymore. Somebody cutting you off in traffic, endangering your life, your car, your family perhaps, can make you very angry.

What's the antidote for that? You can't just say, oh, I'm not supposed to be angry. Okay, I'm not angry. Go ahead, cut me off.

I'll just wait here for another six minutes at this red light because you jumped in front of me and nearly caused a wreck, and now you've gone ahead on the green light, and I'm sitting here at the red. That's okay. You just can't will yourself to not be.

I can't. I don't think anybody can. But what you can do is recognize that God is in control.

God is in His heaven. Does it really matter? An extra six minutes at the light. Maybe there's a good reason.

Maybe God's preserving my life with this six-minute wait here. Maybe if I had gone on there, there would have been a terrible wreck. Maybe not.

It doesn't really matter because I don't measure by circumstances. I don't say, well, I've avoided some bad circumstance because God has kept me here. This is sort of our second level.

We get one level above really bad thinking. We just get into semi-bad thinking, and we think, oh, well, God's working all things together for good, so this circumstance is going to make my circumstances better down the road. Maybe not.

Maybe if I'd been delayed those six minutes, now you are going to have a wreck, and you are going to have vent fenders, and things are just going to all seem to go into the toilet. The point is not to measure by circumstances or measure by outcomes. Look at the prophets and the apostles and the people who got their heads cut off and got sawed in two and lived in caves and holes in the ground and were despised and spit on and, by human standards, had miserable lives.

You can't say that, well, that kind of thinking backfires because then if you do have an adversity in your life, you start thinking, well, I must not have set the right priorities. Maybe all of your priorities were correct, and all of your decisions were correct, and maybe the roof fell in anyway. The point is, why get wrapped around the axle on human circumstances, whatever they are? Whatever they are, they are part of God's plan, and the point is, what's going on in my soul? Is my soul functioning the way that it's supposed to? A well-equipped soul that's thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

God can drop it into any circumstance. Great prosperity, great contentment, great lack of adversity, or great adversity, bereavement, loss, whatever it may be. The point is, are we that well-equipped soul? Are we those who have their senses exercised to discern good and evil? That's the whole battle.

Circumstances don't matter. What a tiny drop in the bucket this life is compared to eternity, but

the soul that we leave this life with is the one that we're going to have in eternity. So why worry about these mundane things that's so short-sighted? When he says, put off these things, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy and filthy language, these things are mental attitude sins that wind up boiling over into verbal sins, sins of the tongue.

He goes in verse 9, do not lie to one another. Boy, this is an easy thing to do. People lie and put God's name right in the sentence the whole time.

In the church today, people talk about, oh, well, God laid this on my heart, and not always, but sometimes God didn't lay it on their heart at all. Their old, evil, sinful nature laid it on their heart. They were sick and tired of seeing this person doing this wrong thing, and they say, you know, God's really laid it on my heart to come speak to you.

God didn't lay it on their heart. It's their impatience and their disgust and their self-righteous attitude that laid it on their heart to come over and talk. I was sitting, I may have told you this story before, but I was sitting in a restaurant with a man who was the vice president of our seminary.

He was the president of our Christian private school. Very wonderful Christian man. Happened to smoke.

We're sitting in a restaurant. A young guy in a pink shirt came over and said, excuse me, sir, but Jesus just spoke to me and said that I should come over and warn you about how dangerous this is and how bad it is for you to be smoking. Do you know Jesus? Well, Jesus didn't lay that on his heart to come over and talk to this man who was very well advanced in years as far as being a believer.

This idea that we have to go out and correct the behavior of others has gotten us in a lot of trouble. We want to put on the new man who has renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him. The image of God, we saw this in Genesis chapter 1, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them.

We were made in the image of God at the fall. That image was distorted. It was corrupted.

How is it recovered? It's right here in this passage. He had put off the old man with his deeds and had put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge. The new man is renewed in knowledge.

It's not renewed in effort. It's not renewed in practice. It's not renewed in brotherhood.

It's not renewed in mentorship or discipling. It's not renewed in noses poked into other people's business. It's renewed in knowledge.

Every believer has to have his own soul equipped. We have to be sure our souls are equipped with knowledge. That's how we recover the image of the one who created us.

In that state, there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian or Scythian. This is very interesting that he mentions barbarians and Scythians because the Scythians were long gone in the days of Paul. The Scythians were very brutal invaders 800 years before Paul wrote this letter.

But what do we talk about when we try to think of somebody that's primitive and brutal and savage? We say, well, he came in like Attila the Hun. Well, the Scythians were like Attila the Hun. Most people can't tell you anything beyond Attila the Hun's name and that he must have been a really bad guy.

He's kind of like the boogeyman of modern days. But most people had no idea who Attila was or what he was fighting for or what a Hun is or anything. They just say, well, he's some sort of a barbarian.

That's what the Scythians were to the Greeks. The Scythians were these marauding, vicious, rapacious invaders that came in and made such a reputation. Paul says, look, it doesn't matter if you're Jewish or you're Greek.

It doesn't matter if you're a barbarian or you're Attila the Hun. That's basically what he's saying. Don't let anybody call you names.

Don't let anybody pigeonhole you, stick you in a corner and say, well, you're so-and-so or you're cold and you're self-centered. Christianity is all about me and you're ingrown and you're contemplating your spiritual enabling. You ought to be out saving the world and so forth.

He says, don't let people call you names. Don't let them call you a barbarian or a Scythian. Don't let them make an issue of whether you're a slave or whether you're free.

The issue is Christ. Christ is all. Christ is in all.

If any man be in Christ, he's a new creature. Old things are passed away. All things are become new.

So we have to make this the reality in our soul. We have to seize and lay hold of that. That's the definition of faith.

When you look at something and you say, that's the truth, that's real, I'm going to treat that as reality. Our trouble is once we get the academic idea, then making it real in our daily life. We have promises from God for provision.

Sometimes something will threaten our security or our provision and that will be a matter of principle. I've seen a situation where someone is in a type of employment and they wind up being put in a position of compromise where they have to be party to theft or they have to be party to falsified records or tax evasion or something like that. It's either leave the job and have no job or

stay there and be party to these things that are wrong, that are manifestly not what a Christian should do.

People can rationalize and say, if God wanted me to leave this job, He would have brought me another one. It would be irresponsible for me not to have an income and not be able to pay my bills. We start rationalizing.

We don't want to live out the truth. If the truth is, this thing is wrong, I can't be party to it, and if it costs me my job, I'll just throw myself in the hands of my Heavenly Father. God has promised to provide.

I don't know how He's going to do it. It doesn't look to me like He can. But I know He doesn't want me to partake in this.

And so that's faith. When it's reality that you believe God will honor His promises, you believe that God will honor those who honor Him, then it may look like you're stepping off the ledge of a ten-story building, but you say, well, if God wants me to splatter, I will, but I'll show up at the judgment seat having splattered for the right reasons. I won't splatter because I compromise.

I won't splatter because I didn't really believe the promise of God when He said He would provide, when He said He would bless, when He said He would honor. It was more real to me whether or not I would have that certain number in my bank account at the end of the month. We have to learn to bring the truth of the Word of God over into our experience and dam the torpedoes.

That's basically what it amounts to. So when Paul says, don't do these things, you think you have to defend yourself, you think you have to deceive others and not own up to the truth, that you just failed, you just forgot, or you just didn't measure up in some way, and we deceive each other. This thing in verse 9 there, do not lie to one another.

We say, oh, well, this is some kind of gross, terrible, immoral lie. This is the deceiving we do because we don't have confidence in who we are in Christ. We think we have to somehow impress people.

We don't want to tell them the real reason why we didn't participate in the event or why we couldn't do a thing or why we couldn't be somewhere or why we didn't maintain a relationship or involvement or whatever it might be. There are times when we are afraid to speak up for the truth, and so we lie. We'll give some excuse, oh, well, I was too tired when in fact I didn't want to go because I think your organization is evil and I didn't want to attend your luncheon.

It's not a prayer breakfast. It's a place where you fleece unbelievers for money, and I don't believe I can go to that. There are times when you just have to speak the truth.

And if you gloss it over and give some innocuous, socially acceptable excuse, it's a lie. When is the Holy Spirit ever going to have the chance to make an issue to someone if no one will speak

up for the truth, if no one will tell the truth when it's called upon? And it may be awkward. It may rock somebody's little boat.

Well, that's the way the chips fall. So look at verse 12. Therefore, as the elect of God, Paul constantly reminds us, if you remember who you are.

This is the thing my dad has told me every time I've left home. When I left home to go to the Naval Academy, sailing off into the great unknown, I never felt so much like I was just falling into a black hole. Everything I had ever known or been associated with vanished out of sight in a totally strange environment.

But my dad told me one thing. He said, just remember who you are. We as believers have to remember who we are.

As the elect of God, it doesn't matter what anybody says, we have been chosen by God. He planted us in this age to be body of Christ, to be co-heirs, to be the many brethren that He is the firstborn among, to share His heirship and His priesthood and His destiny in the eternal future. God chose us.

He put us right here in this age. We're saved by grace. God has assigned importance to us.

Why should I fear what man shall say about me or do to me? Therefore, as the chosen of God, holy and beloved, this is positional truth. He says, look, you've got to turn that positional truth, you've got to turn that academic knowledge into experience. You've got to choose it.

You've got to set your mind on it. The power of God will do the rest. Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering.

These are right out of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.22. How do you put those on? How do you bear the fruit of the Spirit? You have to want it. And if you want it, all you do is abide in the vine. Jesus said, I am the vine, you are the branches.

Abide in me and you will bear much fruit. All we have to do is abide. We just have to remember who we are.

Think on these things. This is what gives us the power, in verse 13, to bear with one another and forgive one another. One of the hardest things we have as a challenge is in personal relationships, and it's forgiving, letting go of some grievance, letting go of some grudge.

We say, but you know, that was just wrong. I didn't deserve that. That shouldn't have happened.

I've been overlooked. I've been passed by. There's some wrong, some injury that someone is responsible for, and we just can't turn loose of it.

And you can will to turn loose of it, and it's sticky. It just won't leave. You ever gotten one of these wrappers that you peel off your socks? And you peel it off your socks and you throw it away, and it's stuck to your hand.

You want to throw it away, but it just won't go. Every sock wrapper I've ever had stuck to my hand. And you will the thing to go in the wastebasket, and it won't go.

And you've got to shake and shake and shake and shake. Well, when you have a complaint against another, how can you turn loose of it? How can you truly just let the thing go and not have it pop back up of its own accord? It's like it's buoyant. You push it down below the surface, and it just pops back up.

How do you get rid of it? How do you get it unstuck? What does Paul say? He gives us that truth in the last half of the verse. Remember, Christ forgave you. Oh, yeah.

Forgot about that. I've done some pretty big-time failure things. I've been inconsistent, and I've neglected and been apathetic or indifferent or forgotten my calling, forgotten the death that Christ died and the deliverance that he tried to give me out of this evil age.

I've missed the mark so many times, and I've done some huge things, and Jesus Christ has forgiven me every time I come to him. And I say, Lord, here's what I've done. He's faithful.

He's just. He forgives me every single time. And here's this tiny inconsequential thing that someone has done to me.

It's just silly. All you do is think about yourself in the presence of Christ, and you can't think about this person in your presence anymore because you're standing in the light of the Savior. And you think about that parable that he told about the servant that was forgiven much, and then here's this guy that owed him a few bucks, and he wouldn't forgive him.

And what did the master do? Well, he came back and got that unforgiving servant and said, you're going to go into the poorhouse until you pay every. He was no longer forgiven. He lost his forgiveness from his master because he couldn't forgive someone else.

And Jesus said, the New Testament says over and over, if you can't forgive others, you are not forgiven. You can say 1 John 1.9 and you can confess up a storm. If there's one person you have not forgiven, you're not forgiven.

God will not forgive someone who can't forgive someone else. Well, that puts a whole different spin on it. That shrinks this supposed grievance down to a pretty small thing.

And Paul says, look, just start cycling that truth through your soul. You'll discover that you can turn loose of that sticky thing, and you can push it down and it won't come back up. But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

This word bond is interesting because this is a shackle. We think, oh, it's a bond like we're all united together. Love unites us together.

That's not what this is saying at all. Love is the shackle of those who are mature. Love is what constrains you.

Love is what keeps you from doing the wrong thing. We tend to take a criminal and bind them. We handcuff them so that they can't go do injury.

Well, love will constrain us and keep us from doing wrong, keep us from doing injury. If you put on love, it keeps us from doing the wrong thing. When our landscape of soul has been shaped to put Jesus and others ahead of yourself, you have already covered a multitude of sins.

It talks about love covering a multitude of sins. Well, love is the shackle. It's the constraint for the perfect.

How do you stay perfect? How do you keep from falling off the wagon, so to speak? It's putting on love, if you just think love. There are many wonderful examples. We talked about some earlier this evening on the break about just living out what Paul talked about when he talked to the Corinthians.

He said, I hear you all are taking each other to court. How silly. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? You're better off being defrauded and being honoring to God than going and getting your quote-unquote just desserts in court and missing the mark because there's no love.

Love is the constraint. Love is the shackle of perfection, of maturity. When we start functioning as mature believers, love will constrain us.

Love will keep us from wrong. You read all of those wonderful things in Corinthians 13. Then he says in verse 15, Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.

It's an amazing thing. You have the peace of God. It wants to have sovereignty.

It wants to rule, but we have to let it. Who would not want the peace of God that we seem to be constantly crawling out from underneath its rule and rebelling and going our own way? So the scriptures tell us, let the peace of God rule. It's trying to rule.

It's there to rule. The peace is there to set and establish the climate of our soul, and we keep running away from it. We keep saying, oh no, I don't want this peace.

I don't want this contentment stuff. I want to go. I want to be unhappy.

Let me be miserable. Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in

one body. It's a part of our calling.

This is how we hit the mark. This is how we measure up and are pleasing and acceptable in God's sight, is to have peace in our heart. Isn't it an amazing thing? The very thing that's best for us fulfills our calling.

When we reach the point of having peace in our soul, that's the thing that pleases God. That fulfills our calling. That's what we're called to, to have a transformed nature and be thankful.

Don't forget where these wonderful things have come from and the price that was paid to give them to us. These things come to us at a terrible cost, a terrible price. And Paul spent a lot of verses back there in chapter 2 talking about the Lord Jesus Christ spilling his blood on our behalf so that we could be the heirs of this peace, so that we could put on love and put on patience and these other qualities of the new nature.

Let the word of Christ, verse 16, dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching, admonishing one another, songs and hymns and spiritual songs. This is the benefit that we gain. This is the arena of function for our spiritual gifts, is helping to encourage each other in this, what is ultimately an individual pursuit.

Each of us is working to let God reign in his own soul, but we can be an encouragement to one another, to know that there are other people who understand that same calling and are pursuing that same goal of being pleasing in God's sight. It's a wonderful thing, and we get great grace through the teaching and admonishing the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. How do you do this? When's the last time you feel like you were able to minister in this way? Well, some people are gifted in that way.

We have people who can call songs and hymns to our mind because they can play instruments or they're good at singing. We try to give room for different ones of us to suggest hymns that we can sing and so forth, and those are important. It's not just a way to fill time or, well, somebody's got to come up with some kind of a hymn.

It's an opportunity. We've had some wonderful suggestions here in the last few weeks, and we've sung some hymns that we hadn't sung in a while, and it's a wonderful thing. That's a ministry that a believer says, let's sing this particular song, let's sing In the Garden or let's sing Rock of Ages or one of these other songs, and the ministry of the truth in that hymn and the person who suggested it, a lot of times you know something about that.

It's a wonderful thing. This is not just filler here when he says that we can minister to each other with songs and hymns and spiritual songs. It's a great thing to meditate on.

It's a great service and a great grace to share with other believers. Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. We can't always sing out loud.

Some of us have zero ability in that area, but all of us can sing in our hearts. And to sing and make melody in your heart, that is the fruit of peace. You don't find people singing and making melody in their heart when they have no peace.

People without peace over in Isaiah, I think it's in 65 of Isaiah, the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God for the wicked. The non-peaceful heart spits up mire and dirt.

Jesus said out of the heart proceeds. We saw that scripture last time. Out of the heart proceed all these terrible things that defile a man.

But out of the heart can also proceed singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord. He closes this section by saying, whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Three times now in this letter, Paul has come to the conclusion of a section and has summed it up with Christ.

Christ is all and in all. Christ is the head of all principalities and powers. He is the all in all.

He's going to move forward from here, and this is where we'll pick up next time in verse 18, with specific instructions for people that fall into different categories. And this will be a wonderful place for us to resume. But this is also a good place for us to pause and close in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. We thank You that You have provided the power, provided the means for us to fulfill the calling that You have placed before us. We thank You for the work of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who redeemed us, who put us in this wonderful position and has given us this opportunity, who has served as the way to Your presence.

We pray to God the Holy Spirit will instruct us and remind us of these things as we live our lives in the coming days. We pray that we will have transformed and renewed hearts and that we will recover to a greater and greater degree the image of our creation, the image that You stamped us with from the beginning. We pray that in all things will reflect the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray these things in His name.